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# Security Council

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## Letter dated 16 July 2013 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to write to transmit to you a letter from the representative of the Syrian Coalition dated 15 July 2013 in advance of the Security Council debate on "The protection of civilians in armed conflict: protection of journalists", to be held on 17 July 2013 (see annex).

I would be grateful if you could have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Mark Lyall **Grant**

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## Annex to the letter dated 16 July 2013 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

On behalf of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, I have the honour to refer to the open debate of the Security Council on "The protection of civilians in armed conflict: protection of journalists", to be held on 17 July 2013.

Freedom of expression, enshrined in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is a fundamental right and the basic foundation for building a free and democratic society. Without this freedom, journalists would be unable to expose stories in the public interest and hold political leaders to account. This also holds true in times of armed conflict. In Syria, journalists serve a critical function in ensuring that the international community is aware of and does not forget the daily atrocities and human rights abuses perpetrated by a brutal regime against its own people.

In 2006, the Security Council adopted resolution 1738 (2006), in which it recognized the critical role that journalists play in reporting during times of conflict and urged all parties involved in situations of armed conflict to respect the professional independence and rights of journalists, media professionals and associated personnel as civilians.

In anticipation of the upcoming debate of the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the Syrian Coalition asks that the Council take this opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to the protection of journalists and seek public assurances from the Syrian regime that it will respect and abide by international law to protect civilians and journalists in Syria.

Over the course of the past 28 months, Syria has become the deadliest country in the world for journalists. The Doha Centre for Media Freedom and the Syrian Journalists Association estimate that between 111 and 153 journalists have been killed during this period. The Syrian regime has banned professional media workers and citizen journalists from reporting on the Syrian conflict, and has systematically targeted innocent civilians with unlawful killings, torture, enforced disappearances, abductions and intimidation. Its systematic attempts to stop journalists from reporting on the Syrian conflict have so far failed to silence the voices of those suffering from the regime's atrocities.

The regime's use of violence against journalists remains a source of widespread concern. In May 2013, the General Assembly strongly condemned all violations of international humanitarian law by the Syrian authorities and the Government-affiliated *shabbiha* militias, including the killing and persecution of protestors, human rights defenders and journalists (General Assembly resolution 67/262).

A year earlier, in July 2012, the Human Rights Council had already drawn attention to the regime's actions against journalists when it condemned the regime's continued extrajudicial killings, the killing and persecution of protestors, human rights defenders and journalists, cases of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, interference with access to medical treatment, torture and ill-treatment (Human Rights Council resolution 20/22).

The targeted and systematic killing of journalists by the Syrian regime constitutes a direct violation of international law, as outlined in the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and Additional Protocol I, as well as in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. These laws clearly stipulate that persons taking no active part in the hostilities shall in all circumstances be treated humanely and shall not be subject to violence to life and person, hostage taking, outrages to personal dignity or extrajudicial sentences (Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 3 (1)).

In disregard of international law, the international society's public concerns and repeated condemnations, the Syrian regime has continued to arrest, detain, torture and kill journalists at will. As the Security Council prepares to debate how to protect civilians in armed conflict, the Syrian Coalition respectfully requests that the Council denounce the Syrian regime's use of violence against journalists in the strongest possible terms.

We further ask that the Council apply more pressure on the Syrian regime to end its campaign of violence against our country's civilian population, which continues to inflict immense humanitarian suffering on our people as is currently demonstrated by the regime's ongoing attacks on the city of Homs. Ultimately, this violence will only end when the necessary measures are taken to support Syria's transition to a democratic and pluralistic State in which freedom of opinion and expression are respected.

The Syrian Coalition reaffirms its own commitment to protecting the right to free speech and ensuring the safety of journalists. In partnership with the Free Syrian Army, it will strive to ensure that opposition forces uphold international humanitarian law and norms, and that measures are in place to protect journalists operating in the liberated parts of Syria.

I would be most grateful if you would share the present letter with the members of the Security Council in the context of the Council's debate on this important issue.

(*Signed*) Najib **Ghadbian**
Representative of the Syrian Coalition